

WASHINGTON

FORMER CIA HEAD QUESTIONS USE OF JET FIGHTERS FOR SPYING

The former director of the Central Intelligence Agency said Thursday the Reagan administration could have conducted reconnaissance of Syrian forces in Lebanon "with total safety" if high-flying spy planes were used instead of low-flying jet fighters.

American F-14 jets used for spy missions over Lebanon have been shot at since September. Over the weekend, what the Pentagon called heavy Syrian anti-aircraft fire was directed at the planes.

The U.S. then launched an air attack against Syrian positions using A-6E Intruders and A-7 Corsair 2s. Two of those planes were shot down, one pilot was killed and another captured.

Adm. Stansfield Turner, who ran the CIA during the Carter administration, said, "if we wanted photos of Lebanon, we could have done it with total safety" by using SR-71 spy planes.

Instead, he said, "we go fly around up there and wait until they shoot at us."

"We were trying to have ... a threat, a demonstration, a political gesture," Turner told the National Commission on Free and Responsible Media, a citizen's group affiliated with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The group was conducting a discussion of the media and international affairs. Turner was critical of the media for what he saw as a tendency to deal with fine points rather than the overall consequences of an event.

In relation to the weekend events in Lebanon, he said reporters should be questioning "why were we flying there?" rather than raising questions about the age or speed of the planes or the combat experience of their pilots.